



At Work

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Utilities water system video and employee newsletter win international and local awards

*The Norfolk Department of Utilities was honored recently for its achievements in external and internal communications with two prestigious awards. The department's most recent video production, **Sending the Water Home to Norfolk**, won the Award of Distinction in The Communicator Awards 2003 Video Competition. **About U**, Utilities' employee newsletter received the 2003 Pinnacle Award from the Hampton Roads chapter of the Public Relations Society of America. These award-winners are products of the hard work of many individuals from the department's different divisions and are proof that public relations and information are part of every employee's job.*

"**Sending the Water Home to Norfolk**" is a 13-minute aerial tour of the Norfolk Water System. With much of the film shot from a helicopter, the video takes the viewer on a 55-mile flight, tracing the journey of the city's drinking water comes from its source to the water treatment plants. Along the way, the



Aerial film crew: (Lt. to rt.) **Curt Hauger**, Utilities Engineer, **Nancy Mraz**, Producer, and **Mike Audick**, Videographer, both of HP Productions.

video explains the processes the water goes through to meet the high quality standards of Norfolk's drinking water.

"Norfolk's water system is so large and complex that the Department of Utilities has arranged helicopter tours for City Council members," said Utilities Director Kristen Lentz. "We thought an aerial video would give a similar effect, would be easier to schedule, and could be made available to a broader range of folks."

The front pages of "**About U**" have showcased a purple customized hot rod, United Way Day of Caring volunteers hard at work, Elvis in various stages of his act, youth leaders, and holiday celebrations. And all those stories were about Department of Utilities employees.



The formal name of the employee newsletter is "About Utilities", but early in the planning stages the staff adopted the shortened version, "About U", and it stuck.

"We chose the title 'About U' to reflect the ideas, interest and concerns of Norfolk's Utilities employees," said Quinton Nottingham, founding "About U" staff member. "This was to be an opportunity for Utility



Past and present About U staff: (Front, lt. to rt.) **Dorissa Whitney**, **Peg Nelson**, **Henrine Robinson**. (Back) **Melanie Pesola**, **Per Arellano**, **Kevin Collins**, **Donya Warren**, **Quinton Nottingham**. Not pictured: **Wes Williamson**, **Terri Smith**, **Geraldine Jones-Dailey**.

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Nearly a year in the making, "Sending the Water Home to Norfolk" was conceptualized and scripted by Norfolk Utilities and produced by HP Productions of Vienna, Virginia.

Peg Nelson, Public Information Specialist, Curt Hauger, Water Resources Engineer, and David Rosenthal, Reservoir Manager, collaborated on the script, aerial shots, and filming locations.

"Curt and David know so much about the history and the details of the water system," said Nelson, the project manager, "and those are important parts of our story."

Hauger was an essential part of the aerial filming, as well, and wore more than one hat on the day of the aerial shoot.

"There was room for only three people in the helicopter," said Hauger. "The pilot, the cameraman and me. So, I had to keep the pilot on track, log the footage, operate the video equipment in the back seat, and tell the photographer what to shoot. It was a long day."

Shooting on land was equally challenging because there were many facilities to cover in a limited amount of time.

At the Western Branch Pumping Station, where the Norfolk Water System begins, Howard Luck, Assistant Superintendent of Utility Division, gave the film crew the facility tour. Howard then turned them over to Tyrone Carpenter, Water Treatment Plant Maintenance Mechanic, and John Foist, Utility Maintenance Mechanic, who showed them the work Western Branch does before sending the water on its journey to Norfolk's treatment plants.



Tyrone Carpenter (front) and **John Foist** go about their daily routine at Western Branch while the cameras roll.

A complete picture of the Norfolk Water System required the cooperation of some of its biggest customers, including the City of Virginia Beach and the United States Navy. They provided aerial shots of the oceanfront, in-flight footage of the jets from Oceana Naval Air Station, and permission to film the ships docked at Norfolk Naval Station, all served by the Norfolk Water System.

All the hard work paid off when "Sending the Water Home to Norfolk" was awarded the Award of Distinction in the Communicator Awards 2003 Video Competition, which is given to projects that exceed industry standards in

production or communication skills.

A part of Utilities' ongoing education program, "Sending the Water Home to Norfolk" has been incorporated into the department's employee orientation program, and it is available to civic organizations for viewing through the Department of Utilities. ♦

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employees to be expressive and share triumphs and trials, both on the job and in their personal lives. It was also a chance for us to get to know one another as fellow employees and gain an across-the-board respect for the duties performed by each of us. In essence, "About U" is truly about YOU, the Utility employees, and their interests."

Since the first issue, the "About U" staff has remained true to its focus on the reader, the Utilities employee. The contributors highlight the personal and professional accomplishments of the employees, congratulate them on jobs well done, and recognize them for the individuals they are.

Per Arellano, Accounting Technician with Water Accounts, has been on the "About U" staff for more than a year. "They asked for volunteers, and I showed up. I enjoy working on the newsletter because I get to talk to members of the department outside of my work area and share information."

Per also likes another important aspect of the newsletter — the story it tells about the Department of Utilities.

"My favorite issue to work on was the diversity issue," said Per.

Published this past December, that special edition of "About U" explored the many heritages of Utilities employees and detailed their personal winter holiday celebrations.

"That issue showed how the department's employees come together from different parts of the world and different backgrounds and make one good unit," said Per.

Melanie Pesola, Management Services Administrator, see the department accomplishing both its HR and PR goals through special projects like "About U".

"Our employees have come together, with the leadership of Peg Nelson as the 'About U' editor," said Pesola. "Peg is an excellent professional communicator, and she has spent 16 years touting the good work of our department. Now Peg has pulled together a great team from across our department to help her tell Utilities' stories of great customer service and teamwork."

"About U" was awarded the prestigious 2003 Pinnacle Award by the Hampton Roads Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America. ♦